

Thailand: *A Period of Transition*

After almost seven years of unimaginative but steady leadership, Prime Minister Thanom is now clearly on the way out. The maneuvering to succeed him and reshape the way Thailand is governed, however, has yet to begin in earnest.

Thanom has become a casualty of his own style of leadership and of problems at home and abroad over which he, or any Thai prime minister, has only limited control. Although Thanom's self-effacement was ideally suited to the sort of collective rule by which Thailand has been governed since Marshal Sarit's death in 1963, there is a growing feeling that it is not appropriate for the tough decisions that the country now faces. In its handling of highly controversial legislation—the tax bill, the budget, the proposed press act—the government has been divided and indecisive. Not only has Thanom been unable to whip his political opponents in the parliament into line, but divisions within the government's own ranks have grown sharper, more rancorous, and unresponsive to the prime minister's leadership. In addition, the public display of differences among top leaders over policy toward Cambodia has not only hardened existing divisions within the leadership but has further undermined public confidence in the government's ability to act forcefully and decisively on an issue of grave national concern.

Thanom himself has grown increasingly weary of the political wars engulfing his admin-

istration; he has promised to give up his post as supreme commander of the Thai armed forces when he reaches the normal retirement age of 60 in October 1971. This would also appear to be a logical time for him to retire from the premiership as well, but strong counterforces—the loyalty of all of the armed forces and police and, most importantly, the monarchy—could suffice to keep Thanom in office until the next elections scheduled in early 1973 when he has publicly promised to step down.

If Thanom leaves office early, as seems increasingly likely, leadership would almost certainly pass on to Deputy Prime Minister Praphat, long the single most powerful figure in the government. With an exaggerated reputation for venality and conservatism, Praphat's ascension would be opposed by many elements of Thai society—including the monarchy and its supporters. His recent announcement that he is resigning from all commercial positions should help mollify some but will not win over his major opponents. These elements would see Praphat's elevation as signaling a retreat from the goal of a constitutional government with representative institutions. There is, however, no evidence that Praphat himself is maneuvering to hasten Thanom's exit, but many of his supporters in the army and in the civilian bureaucracy are eagerly looking ahead to the day of change. ~~(CONFIDENTIAL)~~

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Japan Turns to the US for Aid on Space Program

Japan has recently decided to forgo its "do it yourself" space booster program in favor of obtaining the required technology and equipment from outside sources, primarily the US. This decision probably will be reinforced by failure of an attempt to orbit Japan's first scientific data collecting satellite on 25 September.

Up to now, Japan's space program has relied on two boosters of native design, the Lambda and the Mu, developed by Tokyo University scientists.

The Lambda was used to place Japan's first satellite—a small one not designed to collect information—into orbit last February. The Lambda